
KANT'S CRITICAL IDEALISM

Text source:

*Prolegomena to Any Future
Metaphysics*, 'How is pure mathematics
possible?' (pp.23-34)

THE CHALLENGE TO VINDICATING METAPHYSICS AS A GENUINE SCIENCE:

- As we've seen, Kant thinks that metaphysics must concern judgments that are simultaneously **A PRIORI** and **SYNTHETIC**.
 - But the big question is: *How can any such judgments be justified?*
 - How can *a priori* thought go beyond merely explicative *analytic* judgments?
 - Don't we need *a posteriori* thought if we are ever to have genuinely informative *synthetic* judgments?
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TWO KANTIAN STRATEGIES:

(1) 'TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS'

If we can show that ***every possible experience must come with a certain structure***, then we can know in advance of any actual experience that it must have that certain structure.

- So we know something informative (SYNTHETIC) in advance of experience (A PRIORI) about whatever we will in fact experience.

(2) 'CRITICAL IDEALISM'

We can know certain things about objects considered as appearances a priori, given that our faculties process those appearances in various ways.

KANT'S CRITICAL IDEALISM

- Distinguish between '*things in themselves*' and '*appearances*':
 - **Things in themselves:** Objects as they are independently of the faculties by which we experience and think about them.
 - **Appearances:** Objects as they are given to us via our faculties in experience and thought.
 - According to Kant, while *things in themselves* certainly exist, and are ultimately responsible for all our experiences, we can know nothing about them. **All we can ever really know are appearances:** objects as they are given to us via our faculties.
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‘APPEARANCES’ COME FILTERED THROUGH THE FACULTIES

- According to Kant, appearances are ‘processed’ or ‘filtered’ by our faculties.
 - This processing involves the imposition of ‘**forms of sensibility**’ (including *space and time*) and ‘**categories**’ (including *causal ordering*).
 - So *space and time*, and *causal ordering* are not part of the world of things in themselves.
 - Rather they are *imposed* on appearances by our own faculties!
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SPACE IS PART OF THE WORLD OF APPEARANCES (NOT THE WORLD OF THINGS IN THEMSELVES)

“space is not at all a quality of things in themselves, but a form of our sensuous faculty of representation; and ... all objects in space are mere appearances, that is, not things in themselves but representations of our sensuous intuition.”

“Long before Locke’s time, but assuredly since him, it has been generally assumed and granted without detriment to the actual existence of external things that many of their predicates may be said to belong, not to the things in themselves, but to their appearances ... Heat, color, and taste, for instance, are of this kind. Now, if I go farther and, for weighty reasons, rank as mere appearances the remaining qualities of bodies, which are called primary—such as extension, place, and, in general, space with all that belongs to it ... no one in the least can adduce the reason of its being inadmissible.”

(Kant, *Prolegomena*, “How is Pure Mathematics Possible?”, remark 2, para 3)

HOW CRITICAL IDEALISM IS SUPPOSED TO VINDICATE SYNTHETIC A PRIORI JUDGMENTS:

- Since all appearances are given to us via our faculties, we can know in advance of any experience (a priori) that that experience will conform to any ‘filtering’ or ‘processing’ that those faculties impose on experience.

“Accordingly, it is only the form of sensuous intuition by which we can intuit things *a priori*, but by which we can know objects only as they appear to us (to our senses), not as they are in themselves; and **this assumption is absolutely necessary if synthetical propositions a priori be granted as possible**”

(Kant, *Prolegomena*, “How is Pure Mathematics Possible?”, section 10)

SO IF WE CAN KNOW THINGS ABOUT OUR THE
'FILTER' OF OUR OWN FACULTIES, WE CAN
KNOW SYNTHETIC TRUTHS ABOUT OBJECTS A
PRIORI, BEFORE WE EXPERIENCE THEM:

“in one way only can my intuition anticipate the actuality of the object, and be a cognition *a priori*, namely: *if my intuition contains nothing but the form of sensibility, antedating in my mind all the actual impressions through which I am affected by objects ...*”

“Accordingly, it is only the form of sensuous intuition by which we can intuit things *a priori*, but by which we can know objects only as they appear to us (to our senses), not as they are in themselves; and **this assumption is absolutely necessary if synthetical propositions *a priori* be granted as possible**”

(Kant, *Prolegomena*, “How is Pure Mathematics Possible?”, sections 9, 10)

KANT'S COPERNICAN REVOLUTION?

- “The situation here is the same as that of **Copernicus** when he first thought of explaining the motions of celestial bodies. Having found it difficult to make progress when he assumed that the entire host of stars revolved around the spectator, he tried to find out by experiment whether he might not be more successful if he had the spectator revolve and the stars remain at rest. Now, we can try a similar experiment in metaphysics, with regard to our intuition of objects. **If our intuition had to conform to the character of its objects, then I do not see how we could know anything a priori about that character. But I can quite readily conceive of this possibility if the object (as object of the senses) conforms to the character of our power of intuition.**”

(*Critique of Pure Reason*, preface to 2nd edition)
